

NORTH COUNTRY NEWS

Casino Partner Squeezed Out by Adverse Ruling

By Malinda Brent
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HOGANSBURG — The man who has spent three years trying to bring a President casino to the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe has removed himself from the deal.

Long Island businessman Gary A. Melius dropped out as a principal in the President R.C. St. Regis Corp., a partnership between the St. Louis-based casino company and the Native American Management Corp., which is owned by Mr. Melius.

Mr. Melius withdrew from the venture because the National Indian Gaming Commission would not approve the \$20 million casino deal with the Mohawks as long as he was involved, he said.

"For whatever reason, they think I'm a bad guy," Mr. Melius said. "I'm really upset over this."

The NIGC has final authority over casino contracts between management companies and Indian tribes. Although the tribe's contract with President has spent years at the commission, the Washington-based agency has never given President the final go-ahead. After deciding it was the only way to get the project moving, Mr. Melius agreed to sell his interest.

"He feels like he's worked harder and longer than anybody," said his attorney, Joseph R. Membrino. "He has persisted in good faith to make this deal a success."

Mr. Melius has proposed to temporarily sell his share of the deal to a New York City financier, Ivan Kaufman, who was here last week with President officials. Mr. Melius said that buyout is still under consideration and declined to name his price. The tribe must approve that change.

Alma Ransom, chief of the St. Regis Mo-

hawk Tribe, said the players are not as important as getting the casino open.

"Whoever's in there, the National Indian Gaming Commission will screen," Mrs. Ransom said.

President officials will be invited back to the reservation early next month for a public presentation, Mrs. Ransom said.

Mr. Melius has not closed the door on the possibility of his involvement in gaming at the Mohawk reservation.

"My intention is to come back into the deal," Mr. Melius said. "I'm out until I'm approved."

The NIGC never provided Mr. Melius a reason for its failure to approve his involvement in the project, he said. The agency performs lengthy checks on the financial and personal backgrounds of principals before approval.

Officials at the gaming agency did not re-

turn phone calls.

"We have given them every shred of information they requested and stuff they never asked for," Mr. Membrino said. "We reorganized the data, collated it, classified it and all ways close our submissions asking if there is any thing else they need."

Rumors that former chief John S. Loran benefitted from his approval of the President deal may have found their way to the NIGC, Mr. Membrino said.

Mr. Membrino insisted that a story making rounds on the reservation that Mr. Melius bought Mr. Loran a motorcycle is not true. Mr. Loran could not be reached for comment.

"Gary has been attacked viciously," Mr. Membrino said.

Mr. Melius has filed Freedom of Information Law and Privacy Act requests with the NIGC, Mr. Membrino said.